

Development: A Matter of the Heart

Lecture Delivered at CRUDAN Workshop on Theology and Development¹

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I. Introduction

This paper is based on 28 years of research and missionary experience in Nigeria. More than a decade was spent as a pastor, evangelist and trainer of evangelists in Nigeria's rural areas. During this period, I spent much time in villages, in the company of the poor. I heard their cries and saw their agony. The rest was spent in the context of the Institute of Church and Society (ICS), an arm of the Christian Council of Nigeria, where we have done considerable research into the problems of the peasantry and have had the opportunity to interact with various agencies concerned with improving the lot of the poor. In the meantime, I did research for and wrote an extensive doctoral dissertation on the relationship between missions and colonialism, a study that considerably deepened my understanding of the spiritual and theological aspects of the problems of poverty and underdevelopment (Boer, 1979).

II. A Working Definition of Development

If we are going to discuss development, a working definition of the term is necessary. Let me try one. I regard the term to refer to a situation where the people

- A. Have learned to reject the *dualism* between the Christian religion and the world;
- B. Are increasingly equipped to *respect* themselves and each other as *image bearers* of God.
- C. Are becoming aware of the *preferential option for the poor* in the Bible.
- D. Are learning to think and plan as a *body of Christ*, i.e. *communally*.

¹ Oct/1994. *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 458-459.

- E. Increasingly recognize their own communal *responsibility* for their own advancement.
- F. Increasingly become aware of their communal *power* to improve their situation.

Allow me to expand briefly on this list. It will be noticed that my idea of development is very much concentrated on attitudes and spirituality. If I were a Marxist, I would emphasize the economic aspects undergirding development. If I were a rationalist, I would place priority on the mind. If I were a Freudian, I would probably suggest all sorts of sexually related items. As a Christian, I affirm that it is one's *heart* and *spirituality* that is the most basic. In the Bible, God demands first of all our hearts, for that is where the issues of life are determined (Boer, 1984, pp. 157-158). That being the case, true development must first of all take place in one's heart, the centre of our spirituality. So, I place the emphasis for development not first of all on economic or political questions, though these surely are important, but on heart and attitude. If our hearts and attitudes are right, then we will take the actions necessary for socio-economic development.

Many Christians suffer from an unscriptural dualism that keeps them from a full hearing of the word of God. I will repeat an earlier description I have published in 1989. There I wrote that the main features of this dualism are:

- A. Reality is divided into the spheres of the material and the spiritual.
- B. God is said to be more interested in the spiritual than in the material. There is thus a hierarchical relationship between the two, with the spiritual being more important than the material.
- C. One needs divine revelation, e.g., the Bible, to understand the spiritual world, the world of church and theology. Here human reason is insufficient.
- D. For the affairs of the world, human reason is a sufficient source of information and understanding.

- e. Working in the spiritual area is often called “the work of God,” while working in the world is not really service to Him. Working in the spiritual means one is working “fulltime” for God, while the other work is at best “halftime” service (Boer, 1989, p. 11. See also Boer, 1979, pp. 449ff; 1984, pp. 132-133).

In this scheme, to be truly working for God, one needs to be working for the church, doing evangelism or pastoral work. Any other kind of work is of secondary importance.

This frame of mind is very common and deprives Christians from taking the world seriously and from the motivation to work in the world. This kind of dualism has prevented Christians from meaningful participation in political, economic and social affairs. It reduces the Christian religion to a personal, private and spiritual affair (Boer, 1989, pp. 11-13). As long as Christians retain this dualism, their contribution to genuine development will be minimal. Muslims have observed this of Christians here in Nigeria.

For genuine development, Christians must become newly aware of the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28. In this very first commandment in the Bible, the human race is given the task of caring for and developing the earth. In developing this world, man is fulfilling his original task, the task for which God created him. When a person is involved in development, therefore, he is engaged in the first assignment given him. That is not a secular task divorced from God. It is the *primary* way in which we carry out our *religious* duty before God (Boer, 1979, pp. 491ff; 1984, pp. 150-152, 159-160).

Awareness of this Mandate will effectively erase dualism from our spirit and lead us to a positive appreciation of the world. Secondly, once this dualism has made way to a more integrated approach, the significance of our being created in God’s image must take on flesh. This is not merely a spiritual or theological fact, but it has concrete significance for development. As it is, most peasants have a low estimation of themselves. They have none of the things that would give them respect. They are not only despised by others, but they despise themselves. A healthy realization that they are made in God’s image would replace this negative

attitude to one of respect for themselves and for each other. If that image is closely tied up to the ruling of the Cultural Mandate, then one cannot be content with an attitude of disrespect and contempt for self and fellow peasants. Then one will want to stand up and be counted.

Much has been written during the past two or three decades about the special tenderness on the part of our Father towards the poor – the preferential option for the poor, as this has come to be known. One has only to recall the Magnificat of Luke 1 and Jesus' own manifesto of Luke 4:18 along with James 5 and the OT prophets to see how large a place the poor have in the divine heart. I refer you to our publication, *Living in God's World*, where much of these Biblical materials have been collected. There is an undisguised divine tenderness for the oppressed that cannot but give them a new kind of courage, a tenderness that may not be spiritualized away.

Much has been written also about the communal nature of African village life. In our experience, little is left of that communal attitude. In our Community Development (CD) we constantly run into a strong individualism among the peasants. They tend to be suspicious of each other. Not infrequently the villagers have in the past tried to work together, only to be cheated by one of their own members. Such experiences have made them hesitant to work together again. However, the Christians among them must be taught to adopt the Body of Christ as a working model. No one can overcome the obstacles to development alone.

As long as people wait for the government, the church or any other agency to start development of their community, nothing effective will happen. People have to recognize that unless they themselves take the bull by the horns, they will remain oppressed. Others can help them develop that awareness, but without that awareness of their own primary responsibility the community will not develop. Perhaps something may be built, but no development will have taken place. Nothing has happened in the bosom of the people themselves. They are still enslaved.

Poverty and oppression tend to exhaust its victims and rob them of initiative and imagination. The best within them is totally spent on procuring food, clothing,

shelter and, perhaps, schooling for the children. The ICS's CD programme begins with a dialogue on relevant Scriptural passages that aims at inculcating a new sense of responsibility not only, but also of power. The people have power, communal power, genuine power, but exhaustion has made them lose sight of it. In fact, that power does not exist unless the people are aware of it and exercise it. As long as they *believe* they are powerless, they *are* powerless. And vice versa. A thing, person or agency has not much power of its own, but if you fear it, it therefore gets power over you. But *you* have given it that power. So, this belief must be undermined. This can be done by a programme that begins with Biblical dialogue and ends with practicing it. For example, a community that has long been cheated of its fertilizer by corrupt civil servants, can be taught how to put pressure on those "servants" by sending a large group to the departmental office and refusing to move until someone attends to their need.

The above is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the requisite changes needed in the hearts of the poor to attain genuine development. However, our experience is that where these have been developed and adopted by a community of poor people, they achieve development goals they have long harboured in their bosoms, but were afraid and unable to pursue. It was fear, poor self image, belief in their powerlessness, individualism that are usually combined with a dualistic misunderstanding of the Christian faith that kept them from claiming their own.

III. Education and Development

Since I have defined development in terms of spiritual and attitudinal concerns, it stands to reason that education is a key element in achieving development, education that directs itself to the kinds of issues I have pointed out above. However, at least in Nigeria, little education aims in that direction. I draw heavily from my 1989 publication, *Christians and Mobilization*, for this discussion.

During the colonial era, education was "harnessed to the service of British ... interest," which was first of all economic. The curriculum was designed to meet that interest. It "was evolved to produce clerks needed for the companies and government administration, to inculcate obedience to the colonizing power and

respect for its history, language and culture.” It was also to include the moral element so that “the value of Truth, Honesty, deference to superiors, the dignity and pleasure of work, the reward of Unselfishness” would become part of the makeup of the educated and servile elite. One H.S. Scott summarized it this way: “The conception of the aim of education was, that it should make useful citizens ... who would be of use to us. The conception was one of exploitation and development for the benefit of ... Great Britain” (Scott, p. 737. Boer, 1979, pp. 64-65; 1984, p. 16).

Missions supported colonialism in general, including their educational policy. Karl Kumm, the founder of the Sudan United Mission (SUM), asserted that missions assist “the magnificent work our Government is doing ... in these lands” by means of Christian education (Kumm, *Hausaland*, pp. 266-270; *Khont*, pp. 229-230. Boer, 1979, pp. 136-137; 1984, p. 16). In a discussion on how the government and missions could cooperate in education, the Field Secretary of the SUM was happy to have the government supply the schools with textbooks on the various subjects, so that the mission could concentrate on religion. In other words, the textbooks designed by the government to carry out its educational policy were acceptable to the mission. The SUM was so impressed with the government scheme that it placed some of its own schools in that scheme. This attitude was shared by the other missions in Northern Nigeria. In an inter-mission meeting held at Lokoja, Northern Nigeria, all of them expressed interest in participating in the government scheme (Boer, 1979, pp. 137, 192-194, pp. 77-79).

The intention of this educational policy was to produce zombies, creatures at the behest of the colonial regime, loyal, obedient, ready to do its bidding, either directly or indirectly through the local chief or emir. Least of all was it the intention to produce critical and creative graduates who would do independent thinking, for such people could be dangerous to the establishment. It was strictly status quo – and missions bought into it.

Another part of colonial educational policy was to set up special schools for sons of chiefs and emirs. Again, the SUM was prepared to cooperate in this scheme. The mission was prepared to provide a missionary principal for such a school and

saw it as a way for the government to pay missionaries to bring the Gospel to future traditional leaders. The alternative would be a Muslim principal, something the missions could not possibly favour. It is clear that the mission was largely blind to the negative aspects of such a scheme. Their dualism made them concentrate on evangelism with such intensity that they were oblivious of the consequences of such policies. Among these consequences were the entrenchment of Muslim chiefs and emirs and other northern aristocrats (Boer, 1979, pp. 193, 211-212, 398; 1984, pp. 78, 10-11).

The entire mission approach to education was part and parcel of the general policy to support colonialism in principle. During the early years, the SUM instructed its missionaries to

endeavour to inculcate in the minds of their neighbours and dependents principles of loyalty to the Government and obedience to its demands in this (taxes) and other respects, pointing out the benefits of open roads, cessation of slave raiding, etc. etc., which have been conferred upon the country in return for which but a slight impost is made (Boer, 1979, p. 185; 1984, p. 54).

Readers of my publications of 1979, 1984 and 1988 will have observed that where missions in Northern Nigeria saw the need to oppose colonial policies, they would do so relentlessly and fearlessly. In other words, compliance with colonial educational policy was not motivated by fear or subservience. Missions would oppose colonial policies, but they never objected to this educational policy. Mission and government agreed on the educational basics, if not always on details.

What I am really showing here is that the Christian church in Northern Nigeria inherited a status quo mentality when it came to social and economic affairs. Upsetting the social apple cart was far from the minds of missionary and pastor. The emphasis was on loyalty and obedience. Seldom does the church call on its elite members to account for their stewardship except in formal communiqués full of *dogon Turanci* that can safely be ignored. Such is the social legacy of the church. It is here, I submit, that we have the basic cause for the continued servility

on the part of the Christian peasant. It is also here that we find the basic cause for the authoritarianism of church leadership (Boer, 1989, pp. 7-10). And behind mission participation in this enterprise, I have demonstrated elsewhere, lies the pervasive influence of evangelical dualism (Boer, 1979, pp. 449-460; 1984, pp. 132-137).

The main goal of education has not changed a great deal since independence. The main aim is still the production of manpower, especially technical manpower. In addition, both Christians and Muslims are pushing for the inclusion of religious instruction that aims at inculcating values like respect, obedience and morality. Though these are desirable virtues, in the past they have led to the domestication of the Christian community and have led the church to be implicated in supporting an oppressive status quo.

IV. Towards a Christian Alternative

The virtues at which education generally aims need to go along with the development

- Of minds that are critical, creative and independent;
- Of hearts that devote themselves to the Gospel of liberation in all aspects of life;
- Of ears that have heard the practical cry of the prophets and Christ Himself;
- Of eyes that have shed the dualistic and spiritualistic glasses with which the Bible is read;
- Of a lifestyle that takes the Cultural Mandate as its starting point;
- Of a spirit that refuses obedience to people and institutions that are shaped in favour of the elite;

The ICS has instituted various programmes that are all aimed at the development, that is, the liberation of the people in the name of Christ and in a style that

reflects the wisdom of God. Not all its efforts have been successful. It started the League for Action Against Bribery, since bribery was identified as a major obstacle to development and justice. However, it stranded because – of all people – the clergy in the context of the Christian Association of Nigeria. The failure of this project is merely an indication of the domestication of church leadership.

We can gratefully report that other projects have been more successful. Our Wholistic Health Care (WHC) programme, now handed over to the Christian Health Association of Nigeria, aimed at, among other things, giving the patients, most of whom are peasants, a sense of responsibility for their own healthcare. Recently, the ICS has embarked on an External Debt project, which, again, aims to enlighten the ordinary people as to the nature of this debt in order for them to free themselves by demanding an equitable solution to this problem that threatens to strangle us all.

So far, our most successful programme, along with our work on WHC, is our CD programme that constitutes a radical integration of Biblical teachings and social realities. This programme is adequately described in my *Christians and Mobilization* (pp. 13-18) so that we can only summarize it here. The programme starts with a dialogue on relevant Biblical subjects. Passages are read by the participants and challenging questions are asked by the group leader. Subjects chosen include

- the Kingdom of God to show the scope of God's concrete interest in and power over this entire world, physical and spiritual.
- The goodness of creation and of the physical world gets attention to help people overcome the notion that God has at best a secondary interest in the physical.
- The Cultural Mandate is looked into to encourage people to have a vital interest in doing something about the world around them.
- Our being created in God's image is emphasized to improve self-image.

- The issue of obedience gets attention, but it clearly is obedience to authorities who are in fact servants of God.
- The Jubilee concept helps develop perspective in situations where peasants are evicted from their traditional farms and villages for the sake of development projects that seldom achieve their official goal.
- The communal aspect of development is emphasized as a proper expression of the Body of Christ and as a necessary component of any attempt on the part of the poor to have their due.

Usually, by the time a group of villagers has gone through this process of dialogue and conscientization, they are ready to give it one more try. They form a development group, choose their own officers and identify their own needs on which they want to work. They plan and mostly raise their own money. They build medical facilities, roads, small bridges, establish educational facilities, etc., etc. They have challenged those who cheat them with false measures. They have learned how to get access to fertilizers that corrupt officials make available only to their chosen clients. They have successfully overcome long-established trading patterns dominated by greedy middlemen. ICS representatives only serve as facilitators; the main responsibility for the project from start to finish rests with the local people. *They* do the work. *They* make the decisions. *They* raise the money, though in large projects they may need help in locating sources.

In short, the participants in this programme *move from being objects of development on whom church or government agents practice their skills to that of subjects*. That is development. The *spiritual and mental basis* for development is now there, without which no new skills, government plans and departmental re-organization will have any effect whatsoever.

This programme is an example of how the Christian religion contains the seed for mobilization of the people. The programme provides Christians with *Christian motivation* to mobilize themselves.

v. Conclusion

This paper emphasizes so-called informal education. I will leave the equally important issue of formal education to those at home in that world. For us, development is first of all spiritual development. The hearts of the people need to be redirected, given courage and provided with a Biblical integrated perspective of God, the world and themselves. Once that has been achieved, the floodgates will have been opened and no power on earth can stop the poor from claiming their due.

Nigeria today is filled with despair, cynicism and hopelessness. I believe that leaders in development have a great and exciting challenge ahead of them, a challenge of faith in God and in the ability of His Spirit to move the people from despair to hope, from cynical beating of breasts to affirmative action. But for such a programme to succeed, we need the right worldview. People are not meant to be mere objects. They are not meant to be oppressed. They are created to develop and rule this world and that development starts in the centre of their being, namely, in their hearts. *That* is where we have to strike the major blow. It is first of all a matter of religion, spirituality and the human heart, a heart directed to God's world.

On the birthday of the church, the OT prophecy of Joel was fulfilled:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

That birthday is long past, but where are those dreams of hope? Where are the visions? And where do we hear of prophecy, except of despair? Arise, my servants, my poor, my peasants. But also: Arise theologians and pastors. Arise Theological Colleges. What are you doing to equip your graduates to equip the people? TCNN promised. The rector in the presence of all students promised they would emphasize justice. I have not seen them make a move. Dream, prophesy and show the wonders of liberation brought about in your hearts. For, says Christ, I have come to break the chains of oppression. This is your day. May God give us courage, dreams and visions. This is *your* day to develop.

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